

riting genes and student journalism.

Alan Gateway: You were instrumental in establishing Heritage Day. I'm not sure... is it in effect now?

Berton: It always has been. It's just not an official holiday. It's part of the Heritage Canada Foundation.

Gateway: What sort of status does it have?

Berton: It's just a day — the third Monday in February. We're trying to get it as a holiday because it's more effective.

Gateway: I was reading your old columns about royal tours, and what farces they were; and thinking: Heritage Day probably has the potential for becoming the same thing — politicians getting up and emitting gas. What sort of things do you ...

Berton: No, no. It's specific purpose is to try to focus attention on historic buildings. The Heritage Foundation is charged with

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trying to maintain some of the built-up history of the country. It's not for ethnic dances, or politicians or school children.

Gateway: What sort of things have you done, or are you doing?

Berton: We have the schoolchildren drawing pictures of some of the buildings, and have people planning walking tours of historic sculptures and things like that. It has various different kinds of functions and has presented awards...

Gateway: It participates in the reconstruction of buildings...the Foundation?

Berton: The Foundation does, yes. The renovation or preservation of the buildings.

Gateway: Is it involved in any here in Edmonton?

Berton: The Old Strathcona Foundation; half a million dollars.

"We were always in trouble with the faculty. I think that is a good way to be."

Gateway: Are there any particular newspapers you really admire here in Canada?

Berton: Oh, I think the *Globe and Mail* is a pretty good paper. That's about the only one.

Gateway: What about the *Toronto Star*? (which Berton once worked for)

Berton: It was once quite a good paper. I think it has become awfully flabby, self-indulgent and rather dull.

Gateway: What about the *Sun* papers?

Berton: I think for their purpose they are pretty effective. They know what their audience is. It's not my kind of newspaper, but there are always things in it I'll want to read.

It's been wonderful in Edmonton and Calgary. It forced the Southam papers to pull up their socks. The Southam papers say, "We were going to do that anyway," but that's bullshit. The reason the *Edmonton Journal* is bigger and more interesting is because the *Sun* people forced it to be. It was once the worst paper in Canada.

Gateway: Your grandfather was a columnist and writer too.

Berton: Phillips Thompson is a very famous journalist. He is being taught in some universities now. His book, *The Politics of Labor*, is being taught. It was reprinted by the University of Toronto.

He wrote under the name of Jimuel Briggs, and there is a Jimuel Briggs Society at McMaster University. And a Phillips Thompson club at York. They know more about my grandfather than I do, though I knew him.

Gateway: Were you influenced by his writing a lot?

Berton: No, I wasn't influenced that way. I was influenced by genes, I think. I think that it's hereditary. On the writing side of our family I've got a nephew who is a newspaperman, my son Paul is a newspaperman, my aunt and my uncle were too, and both my grandfather and my mother wrote.

"We let the engineers put out one issue... it was no good."

Gateway: Were there any writers who were very influential?

Berton: Bruce Hutchison. He was a columnist in Victoria when I was a kid growing up, then he wrote several books of history. He wrote for *Maclean's* for years, and he was editor of the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* at the same time, when he was living in Victoria.

He got me interested in writing history, as well as being a columnist.

Gateway: H. L. Mencken?

Berton: Well, I read a lot of Mencken too. I read Faulkner; I read everybody in high school. Faulkner was very big. Dos Passos was even bigger.

Gateway: Do you read college papers at all?

Berton: Not very much.

Gateway: What were the sort of issues that were going on when you worked on the *Ubysey*?

Berton: The Second World War had just broken out, and we were writing mainly about that. And the usual local fights: fraternities versus non-fraternities...anti semitism...



from Financial Post Magazine

...and at the publication of *The Invasion of Canada*, 1980.

Gateway: Problems with engineers?

Berton: Oh, that was perennial, that was kind of a game. It all seemed fairly important at the time, but I can't recall why that was now.

"The reason the Edmonton Journal is bigger and more interesting is because the Sun people forced it to be."

It was fairly light-hearted; we never covered any world news. You came down from the University to interview me, but we would never do that at the *Ubysey* unless the guy came out to the UBC and talked.

Mainly we kept within the world of the campus, not the real world. After the war that all changed. The university papers began to take up issues, especially in the sixties. When we were writing, the major issue was who would win the next football game.

Gateway: Looking back, it seems that we are a lot more serious these days, maybe even too serious.

Berton: We were *not* very serious. We used to make up stories. We would invent parodies of stories, and we had a whole page called the "muck" page which was all wild, crazy stuff. It was the same as at the *Varsity* and the (*Champus Cat?*) which Wayne and Schuster used to write.

We let the engineers put out one issue, in red. It was no good.

We were always in trouble with the faculty — I think that is a good way to be. They were always trying to censor us. Never succeeded. The *Ubysey* has a great tradition of independence.

Gateway: I can't think of anything else to ask, unless you have something else to say.

Berton: No, God knows, I've been talking all day. This is about the eleventh interview I've done.

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